

PLAYING OUR (PAT) CARDS RIGHT

By LIONEL B. WICKET

Spirits were high as Durham arrived at Ponteland Leisure Centre in the warm late-April sun. Guy Paxman (c) had set the standard with a comprehensive mid-week win over Stamfordham. As a result, he found himself booked for a week-long lecture series in Europe detailing his methods for success. It thus fell to Patrick Card to guide the team through a testing 35-over match against Ponteland CC.

Pat won the toss (2/2 this season) and elected to bat, then promptly went to collect a lost Nigel from the car park. The wicket was dry and fast; the boundary, in places, was temptingly short.

Rich and Sid opened the batting against a strong bowling attack. Dot balls were punctuated by strong shots off the legs for four and delicate (and some less delicate) taps (edges?) past the keeper. After a dot and a wide, the Ponteland fast bowler landed one on Sid's pads — the finger went up.

In came Ash, who faced a dot ball before promptly despatching one for four. Ash and Rich kept a tight ship, patiently waiting for and then punishing bad balls. Ash accrued 11 fours in his 53 not out, seemingly at ease on both the leg and off sides. With Ben replacing Ash, it was not until the 29th over that another wicket fell — Rich Root caught on 33.

Vinay looked strong, opening with a boundary and taking clever singles. After a healthy start, the fielder at short cover pulled off a screamer and somehow clung onto one of Vinay's rockets.

Poppy replaced Vinay and smartly dealt with the Ponteland bowlers. However, following hesitation over a single, an extraordinary throw hit the one visible stump from 20ft away, bringing Poppy's innings to an end.

Pat Card came in with six overs left in the innings. Before he could score, a

strong catch put an end to Ben's time at the crease. Saidur was given out LBW and replaced by Theo. Patrick saw the innings out with style, hitting two sixes — one posing quite a threat to any birds nesting on the Leisure Centre roof. A (retrospectively crucial) three off the last ball brought Pat to 37* with a finishing partnership of 52. DCSCC closed on 207-6 — the fifth-best score in a 30+ over game for the club.

After a rigorous warm-up of scoffing cakes, vaping, and resuscitating the captain, DCSCC took to the field. Theo channelled his inner Tony Cleaver and dictated the end at which they'd start; Patrick dutifully obliged. Both Theo and Vinay took an over to loosen up, but the end of the third over brought a fantastic piece of fielding from our captain, with a direct hit to run out their opening batsman.

The new Ponteland partnership looked strong, and the next three overs showed DCSCC what might be to come: a couple of difficult chances were dropped, and some emphatic boundaries were scored. Theo and Vinay both ended their spells with wickets — one bowled, one smartly stumped by a focused and quick-thinking Sid. Ponteland had lost three wickets within eight overs.

Nigel replaced Theo, with Saidur coming in for Vinay. Nigel's inimitable style kept Ponteland guessing, but the batters gained confidence. Grey clouds gathered, and with them came a few more dropped catches...

Fielders were pushed out to protect the boundary, and DCSCC did their best to mitigate the big hitters. Ashish demonstrated his acrobatics and fence-climbing ability when two consecutive balls were sent over long-on and long-off into the adjacent football stand.

He was rewarded with a bowling spell that would prove pivotal. In his second over, the ball was driven high to long-off, where Ben took a sublime catch to remove Ponteland's top scorer.

Joanne replaced Nigel, and the Chauhan-Fulton partnership seemed to

stem the flow of runs. An LBW decision finally went Ashish's way, leaving Ponteland five wickets down. (N.B. Their scoring system is very economical with precise details.)

At the other end, after a determined start, Joanne got her first wicket of the season when the batsman fired the ball into the robust and agile body of Patrick Card. He held on tight and Ponteland were down to four wickets remaining, with approximately 20 runs still needed. Joanne finished the over runless for a wicket- maiden.

The captain decided it was time for an all-out bowling attack and turned to the only man he could count on — Rich Root. His single over conceded only five runs and included a fantastic caught wicket from Poppy.

At this point, DCSCC needed three wickets, with around 15 runs to play with. Theo returned to bowl, with Pat finally giving in to his nagging and delivering an over with a handful of runs and a hotly-contested wide.

Vinay replaced Rich and the game got ever tighter. Five overs left, 12-ish runs to win.

Theo delivered a ball onto the batter's feet that took out middle stump, and Vinay tempted the batter into a thick, high edge with Sid to taking the vital catch. After Vinay's over, Ponteland needed just two runs to win, with one wicket remaining and three overs to go.

"No pressure," announced Nigel as Theo took the ball. The field was tight. The ball came in on the stumps and the batter lofted it into the air — it floated, seemingly forever — before Joanne, arms extended high above her head, took the ball cleanly. Caught out! Unbelievable Geoff!

Ponteland 206 all out in 32.1 overs.

A game of very fine margins, a win for DCSCC, and a great start to the season. Thank you to everyone who played and helped out.